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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7419  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6016  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3147  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1164  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1534  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6124  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7674  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8155  
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SUBJECT: WOMEN IN INDIA: REPORTING BLITZ HONORING INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S DAY

11. (U) Summary. With unprecedented economic growth and rising prominence on the international stage, India hands have dubbed this the "Golden Age" for the world's largest democracy. Indian women have also made significantly strides, as saris and salwar's climb the corporate ladder and break the glass ceiling. Unfortunately, the rapid economic and social changes have not been uniformly gold for "the girl child" in India. The country still grapples with deeply ingrained social prejudices against women, evident in continued instances of domestic violence, rape, dowry killings, and sex selective abortions. Both the Indian government and the country's vibrant civil society have launched awareness campaigns to change these mindsets. In honor of these efforts and International Women's Day, Mission India has launched our own reporting campaign this month that includes over a dozen cables on self-help groups, micro-finance, prominent female politicians, prostitution, female feticide, the current government's record on women's issues, and a host of related topics. End Summary.

Incredible India for many . . . but not all  
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12. (U) The past decade and India's rapid economic growth have brought far reaching opportunities for thousands of Indian women who have made notable progress advancing in a social order long dominated by men. The spread of cable television, cellphones, and roads has created greater awareness by Indian men and women, especially in rural India, of their fundamental freedoms in a democracy. Activists have characterized the profound social change as a gender revolution on the subcontinent. Indian women have made notable inroads in many sectors; for example Forbes' 2008 list of the world's 100 most powerful women includes three Indians who work in fields from politics to business. The chief minister of India's largest state, Uttar Pradesh, is a woman. However, in India, as in many South Asian countries, dynastic traditions, both political and financial, have provided a head start for many of these success stories. The panchayati raj system (village-level community assemblies in rural India) has empowered women by reserving 33 percent of leadership positions for women, giving them decision-making authority at the local level.

Struggling Stats for the Girl Child  
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13. (U) India prides itself on maintaining its traditional society, which translates into overwhelming pressure for India's working women to conform both to traditional norms at home and in the workplace. With the rapid social transition, Indian men also face

intense changes to their social order, sometimes resulting in violent reactions. The Home Ministry's National Crime Records Bureau reports that violence against women is India's fastest growing crime category and that every 34 minutes a woman is raped in India. Indian media reported that some recent surveys show over one-third of married women in India face spousal abuse and 55 percent of women surveyed believe spousal abuse is acceptable. While some may quibble with the rigor and methodology of these surveys, the fact remains that spousal abuse of women remains high. Additionally, a deeply-rooted preference for boys has resulted in a serious female feticide problem throughout the country. The 2001 census revealed an average sex ratio of 927 girls for every 1,000 boys, with even more severe imbalances in Punjab and Rajasthan. Activists report shocking estimates for the number of female fetuses aborted over the past two decades. These staggering statistics have prompted the GOI and civil society to launch several awareness campaigns targeting both men and women.

#### Mission India's Blitz

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14. (U) In recognition of efforts to raise awareness of India's successes and challenges on women's issues, Mission India has joined forces across sections and consulates on a reporting blitz honoring Indian women and highlighting GOI and societal shortcomings. In honor of International Women's Day on March 8, throughout the month we will report on India's colorful female politicians, the GOI's report card on women's issues, female feticide, prostitution, India's glass ceiling, self-help groups, microfinance, USAID's efforts to empower women and improve their health and lives, and other issues. We hope readers will look for the "Women in India"

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title, with the caveat that our efforts offer only a small glimpse of the triumphs and struggles of over half a billion women.

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